The Divine Liturgy—Symbol or Reality

by Dcn George Shumaik

When attending a theatrical stage performance or watching a movie, we do not merely allow but ardently desire that our senses be moved to believe what we are witnessing is real. For example, the wonderful musical Les Miserables weaves through its chords images of anger, conflict and despair yet concludes with the joyful exaltation - "to love another person is to see the face of God!" - thereby bringing the audience to tears. Of course we understand that which transpires in the theater is only an idealized or romanticized representation of the often-burdensome facts of real existence. Taking pleasure in suspending reality for a brief interlude of escapism may actually be healthy as long as one can separate fantasy and reality.

The word symbol has its origin from the Greek prefix syn, meaning 'together' and bol, meaning 'to throw' - literally translated as 'throwing things together'. Symbolon was used to connote the bringing together of disparate ideas with the intention of a comparison to reveal the truth. Saint Cyprian of Carthage circa AD 250 applied symbolon to the Apostles' Creed as being the sign or mark that distinguished Christians from pagans. The Nicene Creed is entitled 'The Symbol of Faith' in Orthodox worship to this day. In the 16th Century symbol began to evolve in English lexicon to mean 'something that stands for something else', often a material object representing something abstract but not really present. Today, proclaiming anything as being 'merely symbolic' can even signify a complete disconnect from a higher ideal or reality.

The corporate worship of the Orthodox Christian Church is categorically full of symbols. The construction of the temple, the iconography, the vestments of the clergy, the incense, the candles, the bread, the wine, the music, the flow of the service taken in

by a casual observer might be accounted as ceremonially beautiful – a dramatic musical extravaganza. Is the Divine Liturgy then just another type of theatrical event we attend to take a break from our hectic lives to feel good for a couple of hours?

There are those who will contend that Orthodoxy is indeed a religion composed of idol worshipers who have lost sight of God through a cloud of smoke. Before taking offence at the accusation, it would perhaps behoove us to consider the possibility that the symbols of our worship have devolved into mere ritualistic commemorations of events now long past and disconnected from a professed omnipresent God. Contemporary theologian Father Anthony Coniaris in a chapter entitled "Divine Liturgy: Reality not Symbol" within his two-volume work "Sacred Symbols that Speak" reminds us:

"The Divine Liturgy is not simply a sacred drama, a mere representation of past events, or a symbolic depiction of the life of Jesus. More than anything else, it is a personal encounter with the living, resurrected Christ. It is the place where the Christian meets Christ in the fullness of His redeeming activity, the place where Christ is made present, or better still, makes Himself present."

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemann of blessed memory adds further emphasis in the following composite:

"The Eucharist is a passage, a procession leading the Church into heaven, into her fulfillment as the Kingdom of God. The coming together of Christians on the Lord's Day, their visible unity is indeed the beginning of the sacrament, the gathering into the Church. And the small entrance is not a symbolical representation of Christ going to preach but the real entrance, the beginning of the Church's ascension to the Throne of God, made possible, inaugurated by the ascension of Christ's Humanity. The offertory, the solemn transfer of bread and wine to the altar is again not the symbol of Christ's burial or of His entrance into Jerusalem but a real sacrifice, the transfer of our lives and bodies and of the whole matter of the whole creation into heaven, their integration in the unique and all-embracing sacrifice of all sacrifices, that of Christ.

The prosphora makes possible the anaphora, the lifting up of the Church, and her eschatological fulfillment by the Eucharist. For Eucharist is indeed the very content of the redeemed life, the very reality of the Kingdom as joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, the end and the fulfillment of our ascension into heaven. Our earthly food becomes (not symbolically but in reality) the Body and Blood of Christ because it has been assumed, accepted, lifted up into the 'age to come', where Christ is indeed the very life, the very food of all life and the Church is His Body, "the fullness of Him that fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23)."

Amen.

Weekly Bulletin

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

A Community of the Orthodox Church in America

Witnessing to the Apostolic Faith in Lake County for over 42 Years

Father Andrew Clements, Pastor

Volume 30 2016 Number 47

Sunday	**Dec 4**	*24th Sunday after Pentecost / Tone 7 / St Nicholas the Wonderworker*		
		9:00 am	Play Practice	
		10:00 pm	Divine Liturgy	St Nick's Potluck & Program
Wednesday	**Dec 7**	*Fourth Wednesday of Advent*		
		7:00 pm	Vespers	Confession
Saturday	**Dec 10**	*Prophet Zephaniah*		
		4:00 pm	Chongris Memorial	
		5:30 pm	Great Vespers	Confession
Sunday	**Dec 11**	*25th Sunday after Pentecost / Tone 8 / Sunday of the Forefathers*		
		Readings:	Col 3:4-11	Luke 14:16-24
		9:00 am	Church School	
		10:00 pm	Divine Liturgy	Coffee Hour

ATTENDANCE / STEWARDSHIP / Nov 27

Attendance: (Adults 125, Children 34)	159
Operating	$2,624.00
Uganda Children	138.00
Icons	73.00
Charities	120.00

CATECHUMEN CLASS

The class will meet this week on Tuesday, Dec 5 at 7:00 pm with just the Catechumens.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

A Memorial Service sill be served for members of the Chongris family next Saturday at 4:00 pm. A reception will follow in the hall.

CONFESSION NOTE

Confession is in order for everyone during Christmas Lent. Please be planning your Advent Confession. Many special times have been added to the calendar for your convienence.

CHURCH SCHOOL ADVENT PROJECT

The Church School is once again sponsoring outfits for Ugandan Children. The project is open to the parish. Please see Debbie with questions and detials.

COOKIE / FOOD SALE

Please be planning for the sale next Saturday, Dec 10 beginning at 9:00 am. We need your help baking cookies and also with help at the sale itself. Thanks.

PRAYER CORNER +

Eleanor Alexander (Tom's mom), Perry (Capitan), Bess (Chongris grndma), Mary & Bruno, Subdeacon Leonard, Jim, (Denise F's bro), Fr Ted Bobosh, Helen Cicmanski (Andy D's mom), Linnea Kaminsky (Matt's mom), Ron Bede, Linda Stiscak (Furman sisn-law), Jim (Ruth's dad), Matushka Laryssa Hutnyan, Sharon Georges, Margaret Pellack, Michael (Chongris nphw), suffering Christians in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Birthdays: John Christani Sr (12/4), Katherine Bailey (12/5), Lexy Tintor (12/7), Sasha Kozikov, Jean Murphy (12/8).

Newborns: Alison (Patrick & Ashley), Atticus & Locke (Dan & April) Benjamin (Tom & Ellen), Alexander (Dima & Lea).

Expecting: Bobby & Juliana, Patrick & Deanna, Chris & Vallery, Brian & Rose, Vitaly & Luba, Tim & Ashley.

Newly Illumined: Alexis

Memory Eternal: David Cook (Cindy R's bro), George Ursinyi (Jan's dad, 11/22).

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